

Pastor's statement, which he entered in the record against H.Res. 861, is below.

"Mr. Speaker, I rise today to stand in opposition to this resolution. As illustrated by the House Majority Leader's memo establishing this debate as 'a portrait of contrasts between Republicans and Democrats,' the primary intent of this resolution is political -- shifting attention from the real issues behind the slow progress in Iraq. In this election year, just four months shy from the polls, Republicans are using this resolution as a divisive strategy rather than holding a substantive debate on Iraq.

"Today's debate, which should have been an opportunity for Members of Congress to have a serious discussion on the war and to pose tough questions to the Administration on Iraq, has regrettably become nothing more than a partisan ploy. While I do not hesitate to applaud certain aspects of the resolution honoring the sacrifices of our courageous soldiers who are risking their lives in Iraq, I cannot be supportive of capitalizing on these very sacrifices for political gain.

"I also disagree with the dangerous analogy made in this resolution between Iraq and the Administration's 'war on terror' policy. There is not, and never has been, any credible intelligence linking Iraq to 9/11 and Al Qaeda. Focusing the discussion on the war on terror and victories won, rather than on workable policies to bring our troops home, reduces this debate to no more than a justification for maintaining the Administration's status quo agenda in Iraq.

"Seizing the political momentum after the killing of Zarqawi, Republicans are offering a resolution which does little more than tout recent 'impressive victories' in Iraq. While the death of Zarqawi is reassuring, we must be careful not to pat ourselves on the back prematurely for another 'Mission Accomplished.' Terrorist cells are still numerous and active, violence is still prevalent, and our brave men and women still continue to fight.

"Although I voted against the initial Resolution approving the war in Iraq, I have consistently voted to support our troops with much-needed armor and supplies. However, this should not be construed as favoring continued occupation. Today the Pentagon's report confirming the overall U.S. death toll at nearly 2,500, underscores the grave and violent situation that our troops face every day. I believe it is our responsibility as Members of Congress to devise a responsible exit strategy. We must ensure that we do not lose sight of our real end goal in this debate: to bring our troops back home as quickly as possible."